THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS

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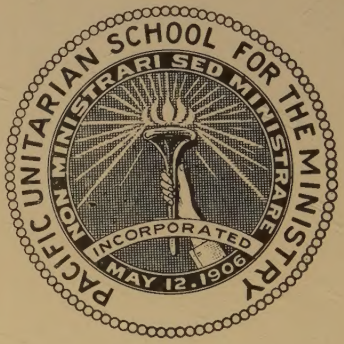
R. A. Armstrong



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The Significance of the Teaching of Jesus

BY

R. A. ARMSTRONG, B.A.

Author of 'God and the Soul,' &c.

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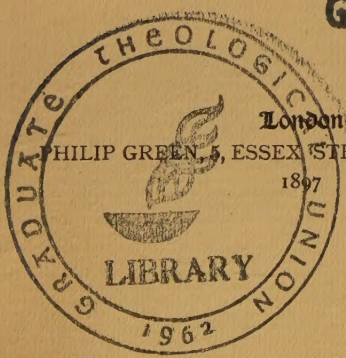

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PREFATORY NOTE

In preparing this Lecture for publication, I wish to lay emphasis on the fact that I commit myself in its argument to no individual critical judgment concerning the New Testament documents. Without far more exhaustive study than lies within my opportunities, I should feel it an impertinence to pretend to decide between the rival schools to which I have referred. My argument is simply this: if certain critical opinions now much in vogue are just, certain inferences which have been carelessly based on them *do not follow*, but on the contrary, certain other inferences, of a very different character, *do follow*. To this I will only add that, apart from all particular documentary criticisms, I believe that the source of the spiritual life and teaching of Jesus lay in his vivid sense of the Divine Fatherhood as an ever present fact, and

that his aim was not to impose on any man belief in this fact as a doctrine based on his own authority, but to waken in all men their own slumbering sense of its reality.

The references to Harnack are mainly to his 'Chronologie der Altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius,' Erster Band, a portion of his great 'Geschichte der Altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius.' The references to Wendt are to his 'Lehre Jesu,' of which the second part has been translated into English by the Rev. John Wilson, of Montreux, under the title, 'The Teaching of Jesus.' The references to Dr. Martineau's views on the Messiahship of Jesus are to his 'Seat of Authority in Religion,' book iv. chap. 2, sec. 1; and those to Prof. Carpenter's views on the use by Jesus of the term 'Son of Man' are to the Appendix of his volume, 'The First Three Gospels: their Origin and Relations.'

R. A. A.

June 22, 1897.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS.

I AM conscious that I lay myself open to the charge of temerity in venturing to deal with a topic which must at once recall the luminous and authoritative Lecture of Professor Carpenter immediately precedent to my own in the present series. His subject was 'The Relation of Jesus to his Age and our own.' Mine is 'The Significance of the Teaching of Jesus.' He, however, speaks from the standpoint of the scholar; while I merely occupy that of the practical pastor, in critical studies little more than a layman. My interest in our problem is practical and religious. I have no contribution of my own to make to critical investiga-

tion. But Jesus touches my inner life very deeply. My love and reverence for him are such that I can never put them forward as a boast or a manifesto. They lie between me and God. I have often felt the emotional impulse to kneel down and worship Christ. What I want to ask is, 'What is his actual significance for my faith and my life?'

But I am going to narrow the question down rather more than that. The criticism of the Gospels is being pursued in our day with unsurpassed vigour, acumen and devotion. I am going to ask, '*Supposing the more conservative criticism of the moment to be well-founded in its suggestions and true in its results*, what is the significance of Jesus in relation to our religious faith and life?'

When I speak of 'the more conservative criticism,' however, pray understand me to mean, not a mere unreasoning conservatism which ignores all the great literary problems of the Gospels, and inclines to condemn, in

its ignorance and prejudice, criticism of any kind, but a conscientious criticism which leads to comparatively conservative results. I have nothing to say in what follows to those who blindly accept the whole of the Gospel narratives as they stand, shutting their eyes to all difficulties, all inconsistencies, all contradictions, all critical problems of every sort. I have no word this evening for these, whether they imagine themselves to find in these Gospels a support to the current orthodox theology or rather press them into the service of a purely Unitarian doctrine. Both alike either wilfully or through blank ignorance put themselves out of court in any genuine inquiry; and their childish scoldings at all critical schools have no terrors for the humble and fearless lover of truth. What I have to say is addressed only to those who believe that an earnest and honest critical examination of the Gospel records is not only innocent in all who engage in it not unadvisedly or lightly,

but is even obligatory on him who desires by every endeavour to draw nearer to the truth of God.

I turn then to Germany, the historic home of the great schools of New Testament criticism. And I select as representatives of the criticism I have in mind two great names of the present day, those of the illustrious Adolf Harnack and of Hans Hinrich Wendt, Professor of Theology at Heidelberg.

That these writers represent a true conservative reaction in German criticism no well-informed person will deny. Until comparatively recent years German criticism, in liberal circles, was under the sway of the great Tübingen school founded by the mighty Ferdinand Christian Baur. That school, as you know, claimed to have laid their hand on the key to the whole range of New Testament literature in the controversy between a Petrine and a Pauline Christianity. Peter represented a Jewish,

Paul a Gentile gospel. And Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the mass of the Epistles, and above all the Book of Acts, were streaked and stained, penetrated and permeated by the interests of the controversialists on either side. The elaboration and exposition of this theory in mass and in detail was a magnificent intellectual achievement. Vast learning, splendid courage, and rare critical ability contributed to the fascinating structure. Most of us were caught up by the fervour of the school a generation ago. And it has left its mark indelible on New Testament scholarship and destroyed for ever the mass of the uncritical judgments which preceded it.

But like all enthusiasts for a new method, its advocates failed adequately to check and guard it. Everything was swept into the net of Petrinism or Paulinism, of Judaism or Gentilism. All other distinctions were ignored. The one key was supposed to unlock all doors. Ingenuity outstripped

itself in the eagerness of the application. The simplest utterances of Jesus were held to be corrupted by the reporters in the one interest or the other. Even the noble simplicity of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, throbbing with the spirit of the Master, was thrown into the crucible and found to be a Pauline symbol representing the superior acceptability before God of the Gentile over the Jew.

Against this school Harnack and Wendt among others represent a conservative reaction,—a reaction not of mere sentiment, but of reason and of learning. It has been shown how many other elements enter into the composition of the New Testament besides the differences of Pauline and Petrine discipleship. In Holland, indeed, the Tübingen method is still in no small vogue, and has been carried further and to still more startling results than those which I have noticed. Nor do I pretend to pronounce a judgment between the German

conservatives and the Dutch radicals, alike distinguished in learning and above suspicion in their single-hearted allegiance to truth. But for the purpose immediately before us I assume that the more conservative results are substantially correct, in order to ask the further question: 'If this be so, then how stands the significance of Jesus?'

For among liberal Evangelical writers in this country there seems to be manifested a certain tendency to assume that these newer critical results carry with them a refutation of the view that we cannot look to the Jesus of the Gospels as a final authority in theology, and re-establish the reasonableness of taking as ultimate in religion his recorded words and as absolute in right of command over faith his sacred person. I propose then to proceed from some of the main positions of Harnack and Wendt as though proven, and simply to ask, 'What then?'

Harnack, undoubtedly the greatest living critic of the early Christian literature, stands in startling contrast in many of his judgments to his more radical fore-runners. He holds indeed that the four canonical Gospels only acquired their authoritative and exclusive rank after long and varied struggle, that the inclusion of these and the exclusion of all rival documents represents a final compromise between different schools and widely sundered localities, and that that compromise was not finally and universally effected till close on the end of the second Christian century. The four Gospels, so he thinks, were brought together in Asia Minor quite early in that century, but not till the last quarter of that century did they acquire their exclusive authority in the great majority of churches.

But if Harnack shows that it took the greater part of a hundred years for the four canonical Gospels to acquire their predominance, the composition of those Gospels

individually he sets down at much earlier dates than some of his predecessors. He sweeps away with ruthless hand the argument by which Tübingen had sought to show that the New Testament documents represent a very slow and gradual evolution step after step. 'Why,' he asks, 'should not thirty or forty years suffice to produce the historical deposit in reference to the words and deeds of Jesus which we find in the Synoptic Gospels? Why should sixty or seventy years be required for that? Why should the height on which the fourth Evangelist stands only have been scaled seventy or eighty years after Paul? Why will not thirty or forty years suffice?' And these interrogatories are hailed with delight by those who saw in the late dates ascribed by former scholars to the several Gospels the gravest challenge to their historical authority. In reply to such premature congratulations it is only necessary to cite the further argument of Harnack himself. He

by no means denies the wide departures of the documents from strict historical fact, or their wide differences among themselves. It is only that he thinks that, in the ferment of the times, a much shorter period than has been supposed would suffice to cover those departures and those differences. He recalls the swift and startling modification and development of ideas in Luther's movement between 1517, the year of the Wittenberg Theses and 1567, when Lutheran intolerance was at its height in the youthful University of Jena, or even between 1517 with its outburst of purely ethical indignation and 1530 when already the Lion of the Reformation had shown his bigotry and bondage to the letter in his conference with Zwingli and his passionate insistence on the literal acceptance of 'Hoc est Corpus' in the Eucharist. And he contends that the power of an intense enthusiasm and the intellectual and religious ferment of the time so mingled with the innate forces of the Gospel as to

bring about swift vicissitudes of thought and feeling. The differences which other critics have sought to arrange as successive steps in a gradual evolution, Harnack sets side by side as simultaneous varieties of interpretation often proceeding from a single mind. Such compression into a strictly limited period alone suffices, in his opinion, to account for the comparative unity of sentiment running through the whole New Testament in spite of the manifest divergencies of record, exposition, and theological interpretation.

So that those who, on the strength of a criticism which pushes the Gospels a few decades further back than had been supposed, claim for them an accuracy of detail and a faithfulness to fact which must not be impugned, are really entitled to but little comfort from the splendid labours of the giant critic of the day.

When we turn to Wendt we can hardly fail to be impressed with the conservative

strain of all his work. One hardly realises that one is reading scientific criticism. The impression is that of a purely devotional study. For my part I have rarely read a religious work which has so deeply touched my imagination or so directly appealed to my spiritual nature. Yet it is criticism pure and simple,—the direct rebuke to those who would have us put aside critical study in order that we may be the more religious.

Wendt recognises three main sources from which the canonical Gospels are built up. Two of these are the common property of the critics of the day; the third Wendt himself has been the first to imagine or discover. The first of the two is the Logia of Matthew,—the sayings of the Lord collected under the name of Matthew and comprising the main parts of the utterances of Jesus in the present Synoptics. The Sermon on the Mount is one substantial portion of it, apparently collected into one in the Logia from

various episodes in the ministry of Jesus, and redistributed by the third Evangelist to fit into appropriate occasions. The existence and antiquity of this document known as the Logia may be taken as an established fact of criticism ; and if the recent rumour that it had actually been discovered were true, we should be nearer to an original report of the actual words of Christ than the world has ever been since the age of primitive Christianity.

The second document acknowledged by Wendt as lying behind the existing Gospels is the Proto-Mark or original version of the Gospel according to St. Mark, from which the existing second Gospel is elaborated. Here also Wendt is on common ground with the dominant critical opinion of the day ; for that Mark is substantially the earliest and not, as Tübingen thought, the latest of the three Synoptics is now the general doctrine of German criticism.

But the third document which he re-

cognises Wendt is the first to attempt elaborately to demonstrate. And in the suggestion to which I refer, he would seem distinctly to serve the conservative interest. For if he be right, then the fourth Gospel may henceforth claim certain elements of historical validity which few recent critics have been disposed to accord to it.

The liberal criticism of the New Testament had for long been steadily settling down to the position that the fourth Gospel is a document dating somewhere about the decade running from A.D. 130 to 140 and the production of a single mind. That is to say that critics had not discovered in the body of the Gospel traces of any older document embedded in its contents, in the same way as in the case of the Synoptic narratives. That discovery Wendt claims to have made.[1]

[1] Matthew Arnold, indeed, long ago hinted at the existence of such a document as Wendt alleges; and there have been more technical critics who have seen traces of a composite authorship. But the originality and precision of Wendt's criticism remains, I believe, unique.

He acknowledges that the Gospel as it stands is a presentation of the ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ wholly from a standpoint based on a philosophy quite foreign to the mind of Jesus himself, the philosophy namely of Philo and of Alexandria. The author sees in Christ the incarnation of the Word of God, and he shapes his story and his report of the utterances of Jesus wholly on that doctrine. But Wendt affirms that woven into the Gospel are fragments of an older document belonging to the time of the Apostles, and reflecting in its account of 'eternal life' and of the gift of the Holy Spirit and in the enforcement of the Fatherhood of God and the dependence of his kingdom on Love in the hearts of men, the very essence of the teaching of Jesus. This document indeed coins a new terminology. Its phrases are not the phrases of Jesus. But its ideas are the ideas of Jesus,—the ideas of Jesus, that is, in the form which

they reached in the last weeks of his ministry, when for the first time he was insisting with ceaseless insistency on his claims as the Messiah. The Gospel erroneously spreads out this emphatic Messianic teaching over the whole ministry of Jesus, and the Evangelist himself continually betrays his own misunderstanding of the document he is using. But, in Wendt's view, all the more striking and important is the brilliance with which the whole range of the spiritual and ethical teaching of Jesus here reveals itself in absolute harmony with that of the Logia and of the original Mark Gospel. And so Wendt finds in the fourth Evangelist unconscious testimony from a wholly independent source to the truth and accuracy of the spiritual preaching of the Master as we trace it in those other ancient documents embedded in the Synoptic Gospels themselves.

The pure criticism of Wendt, then, has a strikingly conservative trend. But even

more valuable than his criticism of the documents is the detailed exposition of the teaching of Jesus which he educes from the sources which he has thus laid bare. In that teaching he finds them absolutely harmonious, and he brings it out with a clearness and convincing power such as it is given to few critics to display.

What then, according to the Heidelberg Professor, was the actual teaching of Jesus, and on what authority did it rest?

The first and ever dominating note alike of his teaching and of his own consciousness was the Fatherhood of God. We have become so familiar with the phrase that it has become hard to us to realise the illuminating and inspiring force of the idea when once it took undisputed possession of a member of our race. It did not mean to Jesus simply that God is our Creator. It meant to him a bond of personal love as between a Father and a son, of the very highest ethical quality. It was no theory,—

no mere intellectual deduction, but a primary fact of consciousness based on the whole inward experience of his soul. He belonged to one of those families, of which there were still many in Israel, which had not been tangled in the legalism of the Pharisees, and were moved rather by the prophetic than the priestly ideals of the ancient Scriptures. But his sense of God's fatherhood and of sonship to God was no mere inheritance from pious parentage, but was the original endowment of a profoundly sensitive and receptive spirit. He absolutely knew God as his own Father, and the knowledge moulded his every conception and every element of his teaching. He uses language indeed which represents God as King, as Master, but that language is as much dominated by his sense of the Fatherhood, as Old Testament references to the Fatherhood are dominated by the sense of the Kingship. So brilliant and overwhelming was this sense of the true relation between God and

Man in the breast of Jesus as to save him from all possibility of falling into the legal ceremonialism of the Pharisees on the one hand, or on the other hand, if he had come in contact with it, any philosophising, like that of Philo, which put the supreme God out of direct touch with the individual soul. On this sense of the paternal love of God he based the whole of his conception of human redemption and salvation. This note persists in the Gospels in spite of all subsequent developments of thought. The Alexandrianism of the fourth Gospel cannot hide it. The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles—a sub-apostolic work far down in the second century—betrays it. No form of Christianity which casts it into a secondary place or in any way obscures it, is Christianity at all, any more than a musical composition can retain its character with the excision from it of the key-note which is fundamental.

And to Jesus it was self-evident that as God was his Father, so to the full he was

the Father of all other men as well. He was their Father always and from the beginning, though the realisation of their sonship was a matter of spiritual education. And from this conviction arose his fundamental conception of the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom was simply the company of those who realised their sonship to the Heavenly Father. It was nothing more and nothing less. Its form might be conditioned by many things. But essentially the Kingdom of God was nothing else than that. As a youth, before the Baptism, Jesus did not realise that the perfection of his own relation of sonship to the Father was in itself the setting up of the Kingdom; and indeed it might be said that a kingdom implies a company, and that the Kingdom had not come till there was a band of citizens. And so at first he preaches, like the Baptist, 'the Kingdom of God is at hand'; but very soon it is 'the Kingdom of God is here.'

His own sense of the nature of the King-

dom of God had come to him solely through his realisation in his own life of the Fatherhood of God; and no other way, at first at any rate, occurred to him of drawing others into that Kingdom than by awakening in them that same immediate sense of God's Fatherhood which had quickened in him with the wakening of his religious life.

This Kingdom carried with it a life of love to men and perfect self-sacrificing service. But that was not, as it were, a second clause in a legal constitution. It was the direct outflow of the fundamental conception of the Fatherhood. If God is our Father, all we are brethren. And the duties incident to that relation declare themselves at once in the heart the moment our common sonship to our Father is realised and forms a vital element of our consciousness.

Jesus was thus too much possessed by the sense of the present Fatherhood of God to conceive of the Kingdom as only future or

confined either to the heavenly life or to life in another Aeon upon earth. Nevertheless, he looked to a new Aeon, to be introduced by the miraculous interposition of God, for the consummation, perfection and completion of the Kingdom. True, the time of mere expectation was at an end. The Kingdom was begun. But this was but the initial stage. Its full glory would only come after the tremendous events which Jesus at first anticipated immediately, but under the stress of disappointment gradually postponed to a future beyond his own death and indefinitely removed.

But what was the relation of Jesus himself to this Kingdom? That he was its first citizen we have seen. Wendt holds that the realisation that he himself was the Messiah, the Anointed Prince of the new Kingdom, burst on Jesus suddenly on the occasion of his baptism. He now recognised that that full sense of sonship to God, which had seemed to him so natural, really

elevated him above other men, and by the sheer force of his own realisation made him Son of God in an exceptional way. But this special sonship carried with it a special duty and vocation, namely to found the Kingdom by awakening in others a sense of God's Fatherhood kindred to his own.

Then came the period of temptation, tested by which Jesus put from him some lingering traditional views of the Messiahship and rose into a purely spiritual conception of its nature. At first he was assailed by doubts whether the Messianic office could indeed be fulfilled without those august and miraculous powers which tradition associated with it. But the temptation slid from his heart when he saw that earthly power was not the true means towards the purpose with which God had filled him. Ferment, inner perplexity and doubt passed from his spirit. His conviction of his Messiahship became steadfast and absolute, and Jewish conceptions, whether voiced by friend or foe, could never disturb him more.

But clear and absolute as his own conviction of his office was, he held it back from all men. His own convictions had come to him solely and directly from the long preparation of his innate sense of the Fatherhood of God, and he could prepare other men for the revelation only by kindling in them the like sense that God was their Father.

But though Jesus, in the great spiritual crisis of the temptation, reached the conviction that, so far as his own agency was concerned, none but spiritual means were to be used towards the spread of the Kingdom of God, the very conservatism of Wendt's critical method compels him candidly to acknowledge that Jesus never wholly liberated his mind from certain traditional preconceptions concerning the Kingdom. His critical conscience will not permit him to read into the history of Jesus' own thoughts, a development so different from what the Evangelists record as other critics have thought

themselves justified in finding there. Wendt considers that, though Jesus believed in a purely and absolutely spiritual beginning of the Kingdom of God in the then present age of the world, yet he undoubtedly failed to shake off the traditional anticipation that that Kingdom would only be fully established and confirmed after the miraculous interposition of God and the miraculous reconstitution of human society; and this, he came to believe, would be accompanied by his own miraculous return to take up his Messianic princedom.

At first, such I gather to be Wendt's opinion, Jesus looked for this miraculous intervention and inauguration of the new Aeon within the term of his own natural life. But men did not receive the Gospel of the Kingdom as readily as he had hoped. And so by degrees he came to believe that he himself must die, and only after a period of life with God return to the earth to inaugurate the new and holier age. And

presently it was borne in on him that his own death must be violent and speedy. To his disciples, who seemed at last prepared by their spiritual realisation of his Gospel for the message, he had by this time declared his own Messiahship; and as his destiny closed in upon him, he became more and more impressed with the need of attachment to his own person; and the old note of a simple call to realise God's Fatherhood faded from the forefront of his preaching, to give place to that other note insistent on believing devotion to himself which makes itself heard at the close of the Synoptics. In the Fourth Gospel that note is erroneously distributed over the whole period of his active ministry; but in the Logia of Matthew and the discourses of Mark the blessings of the Kingdom are made chiefly dependent, not on the mediation of the Master, but rather on a realisation like his own of the relation of man to God.

According to Wendt Jesus repeatedly

and decidedly announced that 'he would one day appear in heavenly glory on the earth for the inauguration of the consummated blessedness of the Kingdom of God.' There were some standing there who should not taste of death till they should see these things. His second coming would be in no lonely desert, in no secret chamber, but would break in upon mankind like a flood in the midst of their worldly affairs. They should see him, the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. In the glory of his Father with the holy angels should he come. However much he spiritualised the conditions of entrance into the Kingdom of God, he so far retained the traditional expectation of such outward and supernatural Messianic advent. So only could he complete his Messianic task.

To realise how strong a conservative reaction is presented by a responsible and independent criticism which lays down

these positions, we have only to compare it with other criticisms to many of us more familiar, with Professor Carpenter's belief that in the mind of Jesus that Son of Man who was to come in the clouds of heaven was not to be identified with himself at all, with Dr. Martineau's belief that Jesus never even regarded himself as being the Messiah.

For my part, I have been accustomed, as many of us no doubt have, quietly to ignore the claims of these eschatological passages to be any part of the teaching of Jesus Christ at all. I have looked upon them as aftermath, as 'Aberglaube,' the mere parasitical aftergrowth attaching itself by degrees to the authentic Gospel of the Founder of Christianity. Nor do I now pronounce any judgment whatsoever between critics like Harnack and Wendt on the one hand and teachers of our own such as Martineau and Carpenter. I only exhibit the contrast in order to show how real is the conservative reaction in the circle of

the highest and most authoritative German criticism of the day.

Yes, it is indeed a conservative reaction and at first glance appears a mighty triumph for conservative theologians of the broader type like the best leaders of Evangelical Nonconformity in our generation. And yet, are they really the gainers? Or is this seeming triumph in fact an insidious undermining of their position?

We have been accustomed to admit certain minor fallibilities in Jesus. Most of us are little disturbed in our Old Testament criticisms by the fact that Jesus ascribes the scriptures which he cites to their traditional authors. We have admitted without alarm that he was apparently unaware of the uniformity of the laws of nature and gave an easy credence to allegations of miracle. We have preferred to think that he really did believe in demoniac possession to explaining away his language as an hypocrisy or an accommodation. We have confessed that

he acquiesced in the doctrine of the activity of Satan as source not only of temptation, but of all kinds of human misery. But none of these things occupied the forefront of his Gospel. They appeared to be traditional opinions not yet shaken off rather than convictions reached by his own earnest thought and insisted upon as part and parcel of his doctrine. But here, in this eschatological teaching, if these critics are to be accepted, Jesus puts forward as a constituent and momentous element of his great message to his race, convictions, not merely traditional, for he gives them a new turn of his own, wrought out of his own profound musings and searchings of heart. He takes indeed from the Old Testament constituent and extensive elements of his doctrine of the Messiah. On the one hand he accepts the image of the Suffering Servant of God, on the other he accepts the coming of the Son of Man on clouds of glory. But concentrating his mind on these divergent

elements, he gives them, out of the pure energy of his own individual thought, a quite new and original and most startling interpretation. For he declares that he is now and here the Suffering Servant and that he will be the triumphant Son of Man. This dividing of the Messiahship into two great successive chapters is the direct creation of his own brain. So also is his interpretation of the judgment to come. These are presented as the climax of his teaching. They are no mere lingering tradition, but a new and deliberate synthesis of his own. And what are the contents of this synthesis? They are such as have been falsified by the event. They are such as even if we could with any legitimacy torture them into predictions which yet after nineteen centuries still are to be fulfilled, would nevertheless commend themselves to the acceptance of no well-balanced judgment. None but the ignorant, the fanatic, or the hopelessly enthralled by ecclesiastical

tradition now believes that Jesus will return to earth on the clouds of heaven, that God will by sudden miracle establish that new Aeon, that the program so emphatically laid down in the words ascribed to Jesus is to be accomplished. We quietly drop the whole circle of ideas out of our accepted faith. We see in it a remnant of Jewish mythology, the baseless fabric of an ancient dream.

If then the conservative criticism which would restore these utterances to the living lips of Jesus is indeed to be accepted, then this conservative criticism betrays those who have counted it their friend. If these things are indeed a part of the teachings of Jesus, then no teaching of Jesus can be accepted solely because it is his teaching, even though it be emphatic and precise, but all must be sifted and tested, and that alone accepted which passes some other criterion. If Jesus crowned the edifice of his Gospel with the proclamation that presently he should return in clouds of glory with the

angels of God to judge the world and inaugurate the consummation of the Heavenly Kingdom, then the absolute authority of Jesus is shivered, and we must go to some other authority with the eager, perennial question, 'What is truth?' If Wendt be right in restoring so much of the eschatological element in the Gospels to the historic Jesus, then there is no escape from the dilemma: either you must believe these predictions in the teeth of fact or else you must dethrone the Christ from the seat of ultimate authority in religion.

Without offering an opinion on the purely critical considerations involved, I do not for my own part feel that there is any psychological difficulty in reading the history of the development of the thought of Jesus as Wendt has read it. Psychologically his exposition has for me great attractiveness. It seems to me supremely natural, supremely human, that as the great Teacher beheld the web of fate closing so surely round him he

should be thrown more and more on the assertion of his personal claim to the allegiance of the people as the sole hope that they would come to realise their sonship to the Father. And as more and more it became plain that not in his natural earthly life could he achieve his immense design, it seems to me natural and human that he should have imaged out the conditions of its achievement by him even after death should have closed upon all that was mortal in him. For it must more and more have been borne in upon him how transcendently his own realisation of sonship to God surpassed that of all others with whom he had to do. And the more he felt that, the more he must have felt that it was on him that God had laid it to convert the world.

But if Wendt be right, then all this process of thought, though psychologically so natural, took an outward form which was wholly alien to the true processes by which God wins the soul of humanity to him ; and

Jesus' own word, 'the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation,' carried a more universal truth than he himself was able to realise. And if that be so, then the principle is established that it is in the purely spiritual element only that at best we can take his teaching as authoritative, and that in the objective interpretation, even after the most earnest toil of thought, he might be and was widely and gravely mistaken.

In inquiring then into 'the Significance of the Teaching of Jesus' on the basis of the newer and more conservative criticism of Germany, we are thrown back once more on the purely spiritual matter of that teaching. With what does this deal? What are its contents? What is its validity? Where are we to find, where did Jesus himself find the basis of its authority?

It confines itself absolutely to the Fatherhood of God and the Kingdom of God.

But of these two great divisions the latter rests on and flows from the former.

The conception of the Kingdom springs immediately, as we have seen, from the conviction of the Fatherhood. It depends on it, is determined by it. The whole ethic is an immediate deduction from the spiritual consciousness. If God is our Father, then all we are brothers and sisters, and the only true life for the world is the life of brothers and sisters, a life of ungrudging love, helpfulness and service.

The Fatherhood of God then is, in the last resort, the sum and substance of the teaching of Jesus. If that be dimmed, obscured, or only half-heartedly accepted, then there can be no true following of Jesus in any other element. To say that God is too remote, or too vague, or too impersonal for the immediate and constant access and communion of man is to cut off Christianity at its source, to kill it at its root, to banish it from the soul. The Fatherhood was everything to Jesus. If it is not everything to us, we may be followers of this or that

ecclesiastical school, but we are no followers of the first Prophet of the Christian faith.

And how did Jesus teach this all-covering and all-embracing faith? On what did he ground his proclamation of this, his Gospel?

He appealed to no authority without of any sort or kind. He based his declaration neither on the tradition of his people, nor on any reasoning from the teachings current in his day. He appealed to the authority neither of any scripture nor of any church. Nor did he appeal to or assert an authority of his own. In the last days, it is true, if Wendt be right, he pressed on men allegiance to his own person. But that was only when death was imminent, when he felt that his voice must soon be silenced, and that the men whom he left behind would no longer be able to hear his own clear tones ringing with an appeal that was not to his own authority. Throughout the main length of his own ministry, in the normal preaching

with which he kindled the hearts of his countrymen, his appeal, as I have said, was neither to the authority of priest or prophet nor to that of his own mighty soul.

No, in his normal preaching, through the main length of his ministry, his consistent and persistent appeal was to an authority lodged in the breasts of the very men and women to whom he spoke. His overmastering conviction was that there was not a peasant in Galilee nor a scribe in Jerusalem who, if he searched his own bosom, would not find the certificate of the Fatherhood of God there within the folds of his own individual consciousness. As he himself, even in his boyhood, among the white streets of Nazareth or on the star-crowned summit of its hill, had heard within him the voice of God calling to him as his child, and felt the touch of the Father's hand upon his head, and entered into hourly converse with him, child-spirit to the Father's spirit, so, it was his faith, might it be with every toiling husband-

man or fisherman, with every mother burdened with household care, nay, with every youth or maiden wakening into the joys and solemnities of life. He brought no message from outside. He bade men listen to the silent secrets of their own souls, bade them attend with the spiritual ear and hear the Father's voice, open the spiritual eye of a pure heart and see the Father's face. That was his method, right or wrong. This was his faith, that all men could find and know the Father for themselves, whether it were founded in truth or in illusion. And they who cling to any other method, or cleave to any other faith, whether they be right or wrong, have abandoned the method and the faith which alone have the right to assume to themselves the name of him, the Christ.

If we go to Jesus for doctrine concerning the end of the world, then we shall be led astray, for of these things he only spoke in those last few days, and in these things he was caught in the web of apocalyptic tra-

dition. The substance of his teaching does not touch them. And if we seek from him some external authority for even spiritual matters, we shall seek in vain, for he knew of no such authority either in himself or in another. Even if we allow the enthusiasm of our love and reverence for him personally to overshadow our direct consciousness of God, we may weaken in us that very sense of the Fatherhood which to him was the whole burden of the Gospel. And I often seem to hear his voice of tender reproach and pathetic appeal: 'Not me, not me, but my Father.'

And so it is that any attempt to coerce us into personal discipleship to him is a direct violation of the whole spirit of his teaching. What he lived and died for was not that men might know *him*, but that they might know *his Father and their own;* not that they might love *him*, but that they might love *God*. And the love of Jesus Christ is only after his own heart when it

springs forth spontaneously and unconstrained from a heart that already loves God more dearly and more deeply than it can love even the brightest and most glorious of all the sons of God who have worn the flesh of man.

It is then to his method, his principle, that we must recur, if we would renew the power of his Gospel on the earth. It is not Jesus that we have ultimately to preach, if we would be faithful to his leading, but the Eternal Gospel which Jesus preached with such incomparable power; not primarily Jesus, but the God of Jesus, our Heavenly Father. To wake in men the vital consciousness of the presence of that Father, of his intimate converse with the seeking soul, of the strength, the joy, the inspiration for high and noble living that comes from the touch of the soul with God, that and that alone is to be a follower of Jesus and a prophet of his Gospel.

This, however, let me add from the ex-

perience of my own and of multitudes of souls. When once we have truly and fully entered into this essential Gospel of Jesus Christ, when once we love God with all our heart and soul, knowing him in the experience of daily life as indeed our Father; when once, without afterthought for our orthodoxy or concerning our repute among men, we have realised, as the central fact of life, that God is our Father, dwelling ever about us and within us, then the hearts of many will go out in a passion of grateful love to him who taught men this so well, not only by the words he spoke, but by the illustration of his pure and tender life. It is when we have most fully given ourselves over to the love of God, that the person of him who realised that love as we have never realised it, rises on our imagination with constraining power over our affection and our reverence. Only this is to be no test of Christian orthodoxy. It is to be put forward as no compulsory religious claim. The religion

of Jesus—the only religion which has the right to be called Christianity—is simply and solely the love of God as our Father and the human brotherhood that springs therefrom. But it is a fair and gracious thing when out of that blooms forth a love of Jesus as the brother who has helped the world most of all towards that perfect spiritual faith.

In some men indeed the realisation of all that he has been, of the beauty and power of his character, of the charm of his humanity, will be stronger than in others. It is to be made no test of religious fellowship. There are some natures among us that spring so naturally to the love of God and the full assurance of his Fatherhood that they are unconscious of any special debt to the pale Galilean prophet. There are others to whom the words of some other chosen saint, or even of a mother or a sister, first brought the flash of the light of the countenance of God. If these be not so

greatly moved as we by the gracious figure of him whom we count foremost of the sons and prophets of God, so be it. You and I may wonder, may be sorry. But these are none the less of the blessed Kingdom. They also warm their hearts at the fire of the Father's love. And we and they are one in the sight of God, yes, and in the sight of him, our Jesus, if he reads the hearts and minds of us Englishmen to-day. The bond of religious fellowship which alone he, the Mighty Teacher, laid down, the only bond of religious fellowship which we can recognise as after the mind of God, is the living sense of our Father's Fatherhood and faithful citizenship in the Kingdom of the Brotherhood of the Sons and Daughters of God.

THE END.

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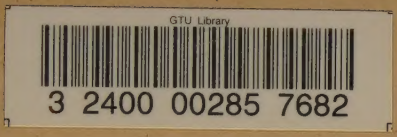

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